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City Planning in Afghanistan

The Activities of the Central Authority for Housing and Town Planning

The field of city planning, and the related areas of housing and water supply, are very new fields of activity in Afghanistan. It was only six years ago that, through the advice of the United Nations and through suggestions of Afghan experts, an organization responsible for these activities was established, and was given the name Central Authority for Housing and Town Planning. There were several advantages to organizing these functions under one central agency. Centralization reduces duplication of effort and hence allows for optimum use of personnel and equipment, both of which are scarce. It also provides the maximum impact by presenting unified and coherent policies of planning, building construction, and better living conditions.

Starting from a small nucleus in 1964 the Central Authority for Housing and Town Planning has developed into a well-organized technical institution. The organization of the Central Authority now includes five major sections: the Town Planning Section which includes a surveying department, a social and economic department, and a designing department; the Housing Section which includes a building research department and a designing department; the Water Supply and Sewerage Section; the Prefabrication Plant; and Banayi Construction Unit.

The Town Planning Section has been able to prepare master plans for almost all the larger urban centers of the country. A major effort has been the preparation of a master plan for the city of Kabul, the capital of the country. This plan was initially prepared in 1966 by a team of Russian experts in collaboration with the personnel of the municipal government, and was revised and up-dated by the Central Authority in 1970. The City of Kabul today has a population of about 550,000, and through sociological studies the increase in population has been estimated at about

7% per year due to migration and natural increase. The revised master plan has provided for the extension of the city for population increases for the next twenty years, when it is estimated that the city will have about 1.5 million inhabitants.

Mater plans have also been prepared for nine other major urban centers of Afghanistan. The master plan of Kandahar, the second largest city in the country located in the southeast was prepared by the Central Authority in 1963 and 1969. The existing population of Kandahar is 120,000, and the estimated population in twenty years is 200,000. The master plan of Herat, the third largest urban center located in the western part of the country, was prepared in 1967, based on the existing population of 100,000 and the extension of the city to 220,000 twenty years hence.

The Town Planning Section has also prepared master plans for the major urban centers of the northern Afghanistan, including Mazar-i-Sharif, an important historical and commercial center; the industrial towns of Kundus and Puli-Khumri; and the city of Balkh, an important archeological and industrial development center. In addition the master plans of Djellalabad, a commercial and resort town in eastern Afghanistan; Ghazni, a tourist and commercial center south of Kabul; and F[illegible], a town in southwestern Afghanistan have been prepared.

Besides the preparation of master plans, of the larger urban centers the Central Authority is also responsible for the planning of smaller towns and even village centers. The Town Planning Section has prepared town sketches and has directed the development of almost 80% of the smaller communities with populations exceeding 10,000. The Central Authority is also responsible for the preparation of town planning and building laws to provide appropriate land use controls. A town planning law which has been prepared by the Central Authority is presently under the consideration of the national parliament.

The next major program of the Town Planning Section of the Central Authority, which has not yet begun, is to undertake major regional surveys from which plans for regional development can be prepared. This will be a complex task which will be done in cooperation with the Ministry of Planning and other concerned agencies during the next few years..

The Housing Section of the Central Authority is responsible for all of the low-cost housing projects in the country. The Central Authority built 10 experimental low-cost houses in 1967, and in 1969 built 200 low-cost houses in Kabul and 120 low-cost houses in the northern part of the country. Another program for the construction of 500 more low-cost houses in Kabul will start soon. In addition this section is undertaking research in building techniques and building materials to improve the traditional techniques and materials and to find new and more economical ones. A well-equiped building research laboratory will be installed at the Central Authority within the next year.

Besides planning and research, the Central Authority also has the responsibility of directing and assisting the municipalities in the implementation of detail plans, site plan projects, and housing projects. One of the major prblems facing the Central Authority is slum clearance in the old sections of the larger towns. The Housing Section and the Social and economic department of the Town Planning Section have undertaken a preliminary survey of the conditions in the old town of Kabul, and work in this field will be increased in the next few years.

A newly established section in the Central Authority for Housing and Town Planning is the Water Supply and Sewerage Section. This section has the responsibility to prepare and implement all of the water supply and sewerage schemes for all urban centers throughout the country. Water Supply system have been prepared for the

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cities of Kandahar, Herat, Mazar-i-Sharif, Djellalabad, Ghazni, and the developing areas of Kabul. Due to financial difficulties seqerage programs have not yet been designed or implemented in any of the cities. Recently however, the World Health Organization has agreed to finance the preparation of the master plan for the sewerage system of Kabul, which program will begin in 1971.

The final two Sections of the Central Authority are the Prefabrication Plant and Banayi Construction Unit. The prefabrication plant has a capacity of 35,000 square meters of living space per year. In the last four years, this factory has built a new neighborhood of Kabul including housing, schools, commercial facilities, and recreational facilities for 10,000 people. Banayi Construction Unit is a government-owned firm which competes with private firms in bidding on government tenders. It is also responsible for constructing low-cost housing projects and other facilities prepared by the Central Authority.

One of the major objectives of the Central Authority is training and developing Afghan nationals in architecture, city planning, construction, and other related dields. To assist with this training the Central Authority has utilized a large number of foreign experts. A team of United Nations experts consisting of town planners, architects, sociologists, building research engineers, water supply engineers, and sanitation engineers assisted the Central Authority in its work from 1966 until 1970. A team of American Peace Corps volunteers have been assisting in similar fields since 1968. Other foreign experts have been brought in from Bulgaria, Japan, and India. Today, besides the foreign experts, about fifty young Afghan architects, engineers, surveyors,, and draftsmen are working at the Central Authority, and a number of other young Afghans have been sent abroad for further formal education in these fields. With this solid basis of talent, the Central Authority for Housing and Town Planning is now capable of providing the necessary guidance and direction for the systematic urban and regional development of Afghanistan.

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